

Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services
Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities

By
Honorable Thomas W. O'Connell
Assistant Secretary of Defense
Special Operations / Low-Intensity Conflict

April 22, 2005

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify about special operations and the war on terrorism, as well as those aspects of our current Special Operations Forces (SOF) posture that contributes significantly to our national capabilities to confront our adversaries.

As you know, I exercise civilian oversight of special operations activities of the Department of Defense. I attempt to ensure that SOF are appropriately employed and that senior policymakers understand their capabilities as well as their limitations. Not only am I an advocate and a defender of the U. S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and SOF, I am also dedicated to ensuring our SOF continues to be the best trained, best equipped, most flexible and effective fighting force available to our country.

Representatives from the Office of Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict spend a significant amount of time at USSOCOM headquarters to assist with developing the SOF program and budget. I participate in the USSOCOM Board of Director's meetings, the Command's executive resource body. This effort produces a SOF program and budget that stresses force readiness and sustainability, provides sufficient force structure to meet

the demands of the geographic combatant commanders and the Commander, USSOCOM in his role as a supported commander in the Global War on Terrorism. I'd like to recognize my Director of Resources, Mr. Tim Morgan, whose work on Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11) issues has been superb.

We sponsor the Combating Terror Technology Support Program, through which I maintain executive direction and proponentcy along with the Department of State for the Technical Support Working Group or TSWG, which addresses the nation's interagency combating terrorism requirements. We will continue to serve the technology needs of the warfighter in addressing the emerging threats. As Secretary Rumsfeld stated repeatedly, that to address any of a myriad of threats we shall be facing, it will be necessary to shorten the decision cycle for force definition, equipping, and deployment. The Quadrennial Defense Review's recently published Terms of Reference is a reflection of that philosophy. Through its numerous requirements-driven successes and by continuing to reflect partnered cooperation across its subgroups and among Federal agencies, the Combating Terror Technology Support Program has shown it can meet that expectation. We also continue to seek solutions from many allies and coalition partners. On that point, we have achieved numerous successes. The Deputy Secretary of Defense has been instrumental in leading an Improvised Explosive Device Integrated Process Team (IED/IPT). Under the executive leadership of the Army, we have been able to apply SOF/SOLIC assistance to the fight against the leading killer of U.S. forces in Iraq.

The United States is at a critical moment in the war on terrorism. We have realized initial successes and achieved a degree of momentum that together support a general assessment that we are making progress in winning this war. But sustaining that momentum and continuing the successes against terrorists and their supporters now and into the future is just as critical. We must ride the crest of successes of the Afghan and Iraqi elections to a new level of democratic processes in the region.

For the past three years we have examined how the attacks of 9/11 have changed how we define “defense,” and how, as a consequence, the war on terrorism is fundamentally a different type of war than any we’ve fought before. We used to respond to the threat of global terrorism in terms of transnational criminal activity. While SOF were certainly a part of the equation, the SOF posture four years ago is one we would hardly recognize today.

Indeed, that is true of the entire military and the entire concept of national defense. Four years ago, we were geared to defend against a state projecting force across great distances, and we built extensive capabilities to provide us early warning and tools to deter aggression. But the potential destructiveness of an attack of the type we suffered on 9/11 means that we are no longer afforded an opportunity to determine an “appropriate response,” nor make a clear determination of when decisive action is too little or too late. For reasons we all understand, SOF have become a critical military tool in taking the war to the terrorists before it can be fought on our own soil or that of our allies. MFP-11 has been instrumental in allowing

SOCOM to chart a steady path toward matching changing requirements against available resources.

I repeat my assessment of last year: SOF are uniquely qualified for that mission. Because of those qualifications and the demands of the war on terrorism, the Special Operations Command has been structuring and shaping SOF in different ways. While SOF were originally conceived to be used as forces for supporting or leveraging larger conventional forces in battle, or for undertaking discrete, limited strategic missions, the new reality has given SOF a prominent, front-line, essential role in the defense of our nation. This change was the impetus for the shift of USSOCOM from not only a supporting command but also a supported combatant command in the global war on terror. Our current Unified Command Plan reflects a paradigm shift in strategic thought.

This means SOF will continue to support regional commanders, while also at times being supported by other combatant commands. SOF are still the first in and last out in many contingency operations around the globe. SOF must be ready to act at any time, in all environments, overtly or clandestinely; alone or in concert with U.S. and foreign forces. GEN Brown's creation of the Center for Special Operations will pay significant dividends as we move forward to operating with the new National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

Before I discuss further what has changed and what our new national security imperatives require of SOF, I want to note explicitly that one of the most important factors and essential considerations for us has not changed:

the importance of the special operator. In terms of missions performed and in the qualities of the individuals who undertake those missions, the special operator is truly unique and requires a different type of mindset on our end in terms of planning and support. Our starting point has always been and must continue to be what we call the “SOF Truths,” which are essentially statements of the fundamentals: “Quality is better than quantity. Special operations forces cannot be mass produced. Competent special operations forces cannot be created after a crisis occurs. And humans are more important than hardware.” General Brown and his subordinate commanders have made sure that these truths have not been eroded.

These truths have been reaffirmed by the superb performance of our special operations forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Colombia, the Philippines and many other countries around the world. I am keenly aware of how very much the dedication and commitment of our special operations professionals are appreciated by every member of the political leadership. I would like to cite the work of Undersecretaries Dr. David Chu and Ms. Tina Jonas. They fully supported the initiatives of SOCOM to address retention issues by fostering bonuses that will help with retention of key special operators at critical career decision points.

General Brown’s testimony will reflect the importance we at both the Department and SOCOM attach to a Joint, Combined, Coalition and Interagency working environment. Perhaps more so than any other Combatant Command, SOCOM has led the way in breaking bureaucratic barriers and fostering interagency cooperation, particularly with the Central Intelligence Agency. I echo his comments.

About a year ago, I had the high honor of visiting some of our SOF in Iraq. These forces make us proud – and should cause potential adversaries to pause before seeking to harm the United States. The commitment of SOF to pursuing terrorists to all corners of the globe is embedded in their mindset. The experience gained in defeating the Taliban and disrupting Al-Qaida in Afghanistan, destroying the brutal regime in Iraq and aiding friends and partners in other corners of the globe, such as Colombia and the Philippines, has matured our war fighters to a keen edge. Our challenge is to maintain that edge, and it will require careful assistance from policy makers.

I also saw that the nature and importance of the new demands on SOF are apparent to the operators in the field, and they are clearly doing more with the additional manpower, funding and materiel you've given them to meet the new challenges to our national security. This level of support is required to meet the challenges of the war on terrorism. The change from a regional, reactive posture to a global, proactive posture could not be achieved nor sustained with the levels of funding, materiel, and forces that we had before 9/11. I believe General Brown has charted a steady course of growth for the foreseeable future.

The FY2006 President's Budget Submission for USSOCOM is \$6.7 billion, an increase of a modest 3%. This funding request will continue the modernization and transformation effort started in FY 2004. It will enable USSOCOM to: 1) transform SOF capabilities to better locate and track individual terrorists across the globe and conduct small surgical operations with minimal risk to the employed force; 2) maintain sustained operations in

areas where terrorist networks are operating; 3) continue to invest in critical “low-density/high-demand” aviation assets that provide SOF with the mobility necessary to deploy quickly and to execute their missions quickly; 4) continue to invest in key command, control, and communications infrastructure; and 5) support the personnel USSOCOM has added to continue worldwide deployments and 24-hour-a-day operations, particularly in the Center for Special Operations and the Theater Special Operations Commands.

This increase is essential to sustaining the necessary operations and to ensuring we can meet the Secretary’s transformation requirements. We are grateful for Congress’ continued interest and support in sustaining the necessary funding for the mission. I would also like to thank this Committee and the Congress for enacting special authorities (Section 1208 of the 2005 Defense Authorization Act) that will permit our SOF to recruit and train surrogate forces in areas that offer exceptional opportunities for success in the GWOT. In addition, thank you for your support on the supplemental that will go to Conference shortly.

I would like to conclude by highlighting the implications the posture, programming and policy for SOF in the war on terrorism have for all aspects of our nation’s defense. SOF have always been the innovators for the larger military, and the SOF mindset has been the incubator of innovation. That is especially true today. With the shift from SOF being postured for reactive, regional contingencies to being a global, proactive and preemptive force, we are witnessing a key process of evolution in SOF that may also signal a need for additional necessary changes in our larger military. Our new Unified

Command Plan reflects this evolution. As a key innovative force, SOF's direction can be a critical tool to inspire the evolution of the larger military and support the transformation of our national defense as a whole in coming years. As a nation, we must identify and address those "ungoverned spaces", and build capacity to deal with those who would harm our country. Most of all, we must realize that we are not in a "battle of ideas", we are in a "test of wills".

Finally, a personal note – Whenever possible, I endeavor to attend funerals of SOF personnel at Arlington National Cemetery. It is indeed a high honor to represent the Department of Defense. When I look into the eyes of widows, children, parents and other relatives of our fallen heroes, I understand that there is no "quit" in their demeanor. We must honor their service and sacrifice. They are an inspiration to all who witness their courage and spirit. Your support is critical to the success of our Special Operations Forces. I thank you for your careful scrutiny of our program and budget. Together, we can help move our Special Operations Forces into a position of prominence that will continue to press the fight against America's enemies. Thank you. I welcome your questions.